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Senate approves Hardiman's welfare reform legislation

LANSING – The Michigan Senate approved welfare reform legislation that strengthens the state's public assistance laws by providing fair but firm support and incentives for recipients to achieve financial independence, announced Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood.

Hardiman served as co-chairman of the bipartisan, bicameral work group that reviewed Michigan's welfare laws and recommended changes. The goal is to offer training and education, while having proper sanctions available if an adult who is able to work is trying to abuse the system.

"We believe this plan strengthens our current welfare policies," Hardiman said. "Under this plan, recipients will be given the necessary tools to succeed and move off assistance."

Key points of the welfare-reform legislation include:

- Focusing on early, more comprehensive assessments of recipients to determine their needs so they can receive the necessary education or training to become self-sufficient;
- Increased education and training opportunities — expanding education and training from 12 months to 24 months;
- Requiring that life-skills training be part of the orientation process and that it include classes about marriage, parenting and self-improvement, among others;
- Increasing sanctions for those who have not been adhering to the agreed plan, using a three-strike approach; and
- Elimination of automatic work deferment for Supplemental Security Income applicants. Recipients would have to show that they their inability to work.

The legislation includes a 48-month assistance limit for able-bodied adults. The Senate proposal includes a 12-month extension for people who are meeting all the requirements outlined in their independence plans and labor-market conditions prevent employment.

The three bills are SBs 892-894. Hardiman sponsored SB 892.

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